

## SONGS IN THE INDIAN NOVEL- AN EXPRESSION OF SOLIDARITY

### AMONG THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

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#### ABSTRACT

Songs in the Indian novels are an occasion to share the sorrows and sufferings of the underprivileged in addition to uniting them. Songs serve as an important medium to record the history of the race and hand over it to the next generation. This paper attempts to analyze these songs, the situations where the song and dance form take place and their role in the development of the Indian novels. It shows how the songs pave way to the subaltern solidarity.

**KEYWORDS:** Song, Underprivileged, Solidarity, Indian Novel, Subaltern

#### INTRODUCTION

“The hundred voices of India are, I would argue, heterogeneous and resistant to the Western discourses that seek to present them. Whenever Indians sing or chant in the novel, they disrupt not only Western aesthetic and epistemological norms but also Western means of social and political control. By foiling any attempt at appropriation, these songs and chants constitute oral phenomena that stand within their own traditions and pronounce themselves in their own terms. Indeed, they compose a subaltern counter-discourse...” (John McBratney).

Songs are perceived as part of the long oral tradition in many world languages. Indian languages have no exception to this phenomenon. ‘Orality precedes literacy.’ This is an established fact and same has been reflected again and again and has been used as a tool of expression of protest and solidarity in different Indian cultures and literatures. The cultural heterogeneity gets reflected in many Basha novels and writers. Indian literature is replete with such instances.

Indian diversity, its multi-faceted cultural and ethnic composition finds its fullest expression in the Basha novels as there is a greater possibility of presenting these heterogeneous voices of people who can sing and share their emotions in the language they are brought up in. Sometimes their predicament and emotional outburst and deeply felt experience are so intuitively expressed in their native language that they result in a powerful emotional expression in the form of a song or a poem. Therefore, songs in the Basha novels are part of a purposeful writing. Songs do appear in the novels with the subaltern concern and a subaltern counter discourse paving way for unification and solidarity on more than one occasion.

There has been a noticeable socio psychological bond between songs and the protest movements in the political history of India. Expression of protest in the socio-political movements is a social resistance of the underprivileged against the hegemony and exploitation by the vested interests. This social resistance requires rhythm of understanding among the people in the society. Songs provide such an understanding and attempt to reach out to the larger sections of the people. Songs filled with emotion and rhythm brings to bear a symbolic unity and identification among its singers as the songs

express their woes, oppression trials and tribulations. Such songs either have a soothing effect with an assurance of freedom from the oppressive dominant sections or they express an emotional release and inspirational intone and tenor with references to the incidents of protest and their success.

In the present paper an attempt is made to examine such inspiring songs and the occasions from select Basha literatures and make an analysis of such a protest and solidarity.

## DISCUSSIONS

It is a well known fact that, the Indian struggle for independence has been electrified by the song *Vandemataram* from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel *Anandmat*. The song has been identified with nationalism and independence. The song became a nightmarish experience for the colonial white rulers. In many of the Basha literatures, songs play a vital role in the development of the plot and the narrative of the novels of the times. In Telugu literature, Unnava Lakshmi Narayana's novel *Malapalli* has songs at its central part of the development of the narrative. In the recent past also, the Telangana movement has brought in many artists and singers inspiring the masses and encouraging them to be part of a glorious future of the new state. Gaddar's song *Podustunna Podumeedha* has become a house hold song for all the Telangana freedom fighters. The song has inspired and reverberated among the people and has a remarkable effect in uniting the likeminded people. "Songs written, songs composed, songs sung and songs danced to, defined the 'Telangana Movement' since start to the end". [The Hindu, 3/6/2014].

Sometimes, songs are sung in the social gatherings. People get an opportunity to share their woeful experiences and get consoled. Such songs celebrate their heroes. Sometimes songs are also sung in order to commemorate the sacrifices made by the martyrs of the freedom movement. Songs also remain as a platform to establish strong identities of the indigenous people, who question the domination or the self declared superiority of 'the usurpers and land grabbers' and their insurgency. On all such occasions, songs prove to be the appropriate outlets and consolidate the subaltern solidarity.

There are many references to the socio cultural songs of protest in many novels of Basha literature. These songs occupy a pivotal position in revealing the plot and the subsequent bond of solidarity they attempt to build in the development of the story line in these novels. Song serves as an important medium to record the history of the race and hand over it to the next generation. To analyze these songs, the situations where the songs and song and dance forms have taken place and their role in the development of the novels are taken for consideration. The novels selected for this purpose are Mahaswetha Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* translated in to English from Bangla, G Kalyan Rao's *The Untouchable Spring* translated into English from Telugu and Bhama's *Sangathi* translated into English from Tamil.

### Chotti Munda and His Arrow

The protest movements against British colonial Regime in the Tribal areas have been ignored by mainstream writers. The movements like Birsa Munda Movement (1889-99) have taken place in the writings of Mahasweta Devi. She has written about the lives and rich cultural heritage of the tribals of the Chotanagpur region. She has recorded some of their songs and revolts against the colonial hegemony. There are references to songs sung on different occasions and their reverence to Birsa cult and Birsa Movement. The Munda tribe is connected with protest movements-Ulgulan or the Great Tumult in order to resist the influx and the hegemonic grip of the outsiders in the area during the British rule. According to Gayatri Spivak "*Chotti Munda* repeatedly dramatizes subaltern solidarity." (Devi, 366) That solidarity is clearly noticeable in their songs.

The legendary leader Dhani Munda sacrifices his life for the cause of the honor and independence of the Munda Tribe and the other underprivileged. He has fought against the oppression and exploitation of the colonial power. He was killed by the forces of colonial rulers. His people who don't know writing and script have recorded the heroic story of Dhani Munda in their songs.

When Dhani Munda is banned to enter Chaibasa and the legendary warrior is prohibited from lifting the arrow his tribe immediately compose a song singing about the suppressive measures:

'Dhani, Ye came out of t'je-hellhouse  
Big polis boss said with red eyes  
Ranchi and Chaibasha are forbidden for ye  
Ye won' lift bow and arrow (24, Devi)

People and police believe that if Dhani Munda lifts an arrow it will call the great revolt-Ulgulan-again. When Dhani Munda is killed by the police at Sailrakab, the emotional outburst of the people results in an instantaneous response in the form of a song which immortalizes Dhani Munda and records his history. His heroism is inspiring to the generations to come.

Ont' day of his body's death in Sailrakab  
He comes to look for his disciples  
He calls loud shakin' t' hills,  
Hey who kept me in mind, who's forgotten  
Who's here crazy for Ulgulan, for Revolution!  
Father Earth called ye//  
Ye said, Hey I've come  
Ye climbed up on t' black cloud  
.....  
Ye vanished into Sailrakab stone//  
.....  
Ah! On sailrakab stone now flowers bloom  
Ye are those flowers' (Devi, 24)

"These people do not find anyone writing about them, and they do not have script. They compose the stream of events into songs. By being made into song, into words, they become something.. continuity. Their history is like a big flowing river going somewhere, not without a destination" (Mahasweta devi, interview xi).

Chotti Munda who takes bow and arrow from Dhani Munda stands as a symbol of continuity of Birsa cult. He is a leader with a vision for the well being of his people and also for the other underprivileged. Chotti participates in fairs and

contests with amazing skills. Many stories get circulated about his powers of archery. He is respected and revered everywhere. It is said and believed that his arrow has an effect of a spell. Again, there are songs composed and sung in this respect in the honour of Chotti Munda. Every significant incident is recorded and celebrated in their songs about Chotti. It is the way the Mundas keep up their history and continue to transfer this knowledge of their ancestors in their songs from one generation to the other.

The Mundas are music lovers. Everytime, the protagonist skills of archery frightens the authorities and they impose ban on the archery of the Munda heroes. It happens in the case of Dani Munda and Chotti Munda. This act of suppression and tyranny is recorded in the songs of the Munda people. These songs serve as a moral support to the protagonist. When Chotti Munda, like Dhani Munda, is also banned to shoot arrows, his people sing:

“Ye raise t’bow, ye hit t’target

Makes Daroga mighty afraid, mate

.....

So they didn’t let ya play yer arrer.” (Devi, 84)

Suddenly, after a fair and feast Chotti hears the song. Chotti says “Hey, no more. I’m shamed, why all this ‘bout a man ye know well? I’m shamed, no?” (Devi, 84). The humility and friendly nature of Chotti is clearly visible here. Their songs are a source of inspiration to the fellow protesters. They feel proud of their warrior leaders and this is expressed in their songs which forge a sense of unity among their tribesmen. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* proves the necessity and significance of the songs in the cultural life of these people.

### Untouchable Spring

Like in Mahasweta Devi’s novel, G Kalyan Rao, the Telugu novelist, in his novel *Untouchable Spring* focuses on the significance of songs in the history of protests. The oppressed and the outcaste in the novel choose song and dance as a way to express their protest and wish to be treated equally.

Yellanna is the protagonist in the novel who connects generations after and before Independence of India. He sings and dances. He witnesses the cruelty of the upper caste landlords. He understands the miseries of the Dalit. Yellanna, born in Yennela Dinni, is son of Yerrankadu. His father’s sister, Boodevi brought up her nephew with dance and songs.

One day Yellanna approaches the tent of Yerragollalu, who have come to perform ‘*Chenchu Natakam*’, to see them from close quarters. The so called ‘Caste’ people chase him away.

Yellanna runs away from his village and happens to meet Urumula Naganna, a folk dancer and singer. Both of them come back to the village to perform Veedhi Bagotam (Telugu folk Drama of dance and song) and they bring a change in the atmosphere of the palle (hamlet).

“In fact, Veedhi Bagotam is a great representation of the combination of song, music, dance and expression. A society. A culture. A living art of turning gods and goddesses into true village folk, of conversing and of performing amidst people without the obstructing curtains”. [Rao, 78]

The performers of the Veedhi Bagotam, Yellanna, Naganna and others, express their sense of protest through their

performances. In the so-called-high-caste society, it is a customary to invite the heads of the village including Reddy and Karanam before the drama begins. But the oppression of the heads in the village on the dalits has gone so far that the performers don't want to invite them. Instead of the Karanam and the Reddy they invite the Pedda( head) Mala and the Pedda( head) Madiga as a honor to them.

“‘Arey, Servant!’

‘Ayya’

‘Have the great Peddamala and the Peddamadiga who is as great come and adorned the seats?’”[Rao, 75].

This addressing and invitation has raised their self respect to the sky.

As a result of their sharing the happy moments in participating in the song and dance performance, the Mala and the Madiga, have forgotten the differences among them and sit together in the meetings as a unit without blaming each other. Here, the significance of the song and the assertion of the cultural identity of the group through the song and dance performance are well brought out by the novelist in the *Untouchable spring*. The village heads Karanam and Reddy observe that there is a change taking place in Yennala Dinni.

“People were laughing freely watching the performance. They were not afraid that the karanam would see. They were not inhibited that the rich kapus would listen. The performance was theirs. Those who performed, those who were watching were they themselves.” [Rao, 75]

The song and dance performance *Chenchulakshmi* unites the people of the surrounding hamlets KollaDinni, Pakkela Dinni, Chintalagunta and other villages. The people of Malapalli and Madigapalli of Yennela Dinni share their happy moments. The play of song and dance ‘Chenchulakshmi’ begins. The God in the play Narasimha Swamy is asked about his skills of hunting. Though the song is not mentioned in the lyric form in the novel, it is a well-known song.

Chettulekkagalava, O Narahari

Nuvu guttalekkagalava..... (Can you climb trees and hillocks?)

Someone from the crowd asks whether the protagonist Yellanna who is playing the role of Narasimha Swamy can reap the harvest.

In this way the audience share lighter moments among themselves and they have become one with the performance. Sometimes they converse with the actors in the performance.

“The real play was going on like that. In the midst of the crowd, along with the crowd...” [Rao, 77]

The song takes all of them into its fold and unites them. The performance brings the Mala and the Madiga together to fight against the hegemonic forces.

### Sangati

Just as in the Telugu and the Bangla novels, in the Tamil narrative ‘*Sangati*’ (1994), songs are sung on every occasion to share their feelings. *Sangati* is a well-known dalit autobiographical novel that has brought out the troubles and miseries with punctuated protests of the dalit women. They are independent and freely express their protest and sorrow.

In *Sangati* the writer says that they have songs for each and every occasion. Birth and wedding are major

occasions in every family where they sing appropriate songs for the occasion. In the farm fields-while weeding, transplanting rice, cutting the crops-they mix songs and work and forget their toil and tiredness. They tease each other through their songs and laugh and feel delighted. After the betrothal ceremony of Nanappu's daughter, Ranjitham, the women who worked with her made up a song teasing her because her prospective bridegroom was darker than she was:

"Handsome man, dark as a crow

More handsome than a blackened pot" (Bama, 77)

Another song was about a man who walked off in anger, after making a huge fuss over a mere trifle:

"Is it because I spluttered over you

You haven't talked to me for eight days?" (Bama, 77)

There is another song that illustrates the brutality of men. This song reveals that the cruel custom that women should take food only after their husbands have taken theirs.

"Crab, O crab, my pretty little crab

Who wandered through all the fields I planted,

I pulled off your claws and put you in the pot

I gave the pot a boil and set it down.

I waited and waited for him to come home

And began to eat as he came through the door.

He came to hit me, the hungry brute

He pounced at me to kill me

He struck me, he struck my child

He almost crushed the baby in my womb

He beat me until my legs buckled

He thrashed me until my bangles smashed." (Bama, 30)

"The song says that the husband beat her up so much even though she was carrying a child—and all this torture just because she caught some crabs from the wet fields and made acurry and ate it before he came home for his meal" [Bama,30].

Song is a platform for them to share their feelings, to forget their worries and to feel one with the group.

## CONCLUSIONS

Songs appeal to every heart, every situation. They inspire and unite the hearts of people in general and of the underprivileged in particular. Songs are an occasion to share their sorrows and suffering in addition to uniting and consolidating the underprivileged and the multicultural ethnic groups.

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